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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 27th MEETING
(SECOND PART)*

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 18 February 1993, at 3.30 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. FLINTERMAN (Netherlands)

later: Mr. GARRETON (Chile)

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Implementation of the Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (continued)

* The summary record of the first part of the meeting appears as E/CN.4/1993/SR.27.

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The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF INTOLERANCE AND OF DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RELIGION OR BELIEF (agenda item 22) (continued) (E/CN.4/1993/62 and Corr.1 and Add.1; E/CN.4/1993/63 and 86; E/CN.4/1993/NGO/27; E/CN.4/1992/52)

1. Mr. YOUSIF (Observer for Iraq) said that his country, as the cradle of civilization, attached very great importance to the elimination of all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. While belonging for historical reasons to a variety of religions, Iraqi citizens were united by national sentiment and their attachment to the principle of non-discrimination.

2. The reports submitted by Iraq to the Human Rights Committee bore witness to his country's endeavours to implement article 18 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights relating to the right of freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Iraq fully supported Commission on Human Rights resolution 92/17 and General Assembly resolution 47/129, in which the Human Rights Committee and the Commission on Human Rights, respectively, were requested to prepare a general comment on article 18.

3. Iraq had always cooperated with Mr. Angelo Vidal d'Almeida Ribeiro, the Special Rapporteur, and had supplied him with all information requested. It should be pointed out that, at the time of the aggression of which Iraq had been the victim, religion had been used as a weapon to set the various religious groups against one another in order to undermine national unity and the territorial integrity of the country.

4. A stand must be made against religious intolerance, which could lead to massacres, or even genocide, and the right to diversity and religious pluralism must be accepted. It should be borne in mind in that connection that Islam respected the other religions, which it had come to complement.

5. Religion must not be used for political ends. In many cases, so-called religious conflicts were in fact political. Attempts were made to set religious communities against one another in order to establish petty States. The odious practice of ethnic cleansing showed to what lengths intolerance could go. As the Secretary-General said in his Agenda for Peace (para. 17), if every ethnic religious or linguistic group claimed statehood, there would be no limit to fragmentation, and peace, security and economic well-being for all would become ever more difficult to achieve.

6. The principles laid down in the Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance should not be separated from other rules of international law, particularly those concerning friendly relations among States, and respect for national sovereignty and the territorial integrity of States.

7. Regions had a role to play in the implementation of the Declaration since regional institutions were very well acquainted with the history of the cultural and religious situation of the countries that made them up and were consequently in a position to forestall possible conflicts.

8. Iraq believed that culture could make a major contribution to the elimination of intolerance and welcomed the proclamation by UNESCO of 1995 as United Nations Year for Tolerance.

9. Mr. SWIFT (Observer for Ireland) said that it was clear from Mr. Angelo Vidal d'Almeida Ribeiro's report (E/CN.4/1993/62) that, in various parts of the world, many people were treated as second-class citizens, oppressed, persecuted, and even murdered on account of their religion or beliefs. It was a scandal that several countries had over the past year adopted legislative or administrative measures that threatened the freedoms enunciated in article 18 of the Universal Declaration.

10. Ireland also deplored the fact that many Governments had not replied to requests for information from the Special Rapporteur or had done so in a manner that called in question the very basis of his mandate.

11. Furthermore, the mere fact that Governments answered the Special Rapporteur's questions did not mean that problems of religious intolerance were solved. Their scale was such that, if there was to be any hope of dealing with them, something beyond the question and answer approach of the annual report was required. The Special Rapporteur could, for example, in his dialogue with Governments, routinely propose that he should visit countries where there appeared to be incidents occurring contrary to the Declaration.

12. His delegation noted that the Sudanese Government had recently invited the Special Rapporteur to visit Sudan, where reports of persecutions of Christians and Animists prompted the gravest concern. Displaced persons were alleged to be subjected to odious pressure, sometimes being offered food in exchange for conversion to Islam.

13. Mr. d'Almeida Ribeiro emphasized in his report that violations of the provisions of the Declaration were also in breach of the rights set forth in the International Covenants. The Special Rapporteur should accordingly cooperate as closely as possible with the other rapporteurs and working groups (both thematic and country) of the Commission. Such cooperation, which should not be limited to occasional contacts, would make it possible, when required, to investigate thoroughly and without delay any incident or measure taken by a particular Government.

14. The Special Rapporteur had welcomed the readiness of some Governments to avail themselves of the consultative services of the Centre for Human Rights, and he had also called on States to be more energetic in introducing effective judicial and administrative remedies for victims of religious intolerance. His delegation regarded the two matters as connected and thought that the Special Rapporteur should make specific and practical recommendations in his annual report on measures that States should take and on the assistance they might require. The Special Rapporteur should, without making accusations or passing value judgements, be able to draw country specific conclusions which would help them implement the Declaration more effectively.

15. He wished to thank Mr. d'Almeida Ribeiro for his work as Special Rapporteur.

16. Mr. MYA THAN (Observer for Myanmar) said that, in his country, no one suffered discrimination on grounds of religion. The main religions - Buddhism, Islam, Christianity and Hinduism - flourished and coexisted in complete harmony. It was true that the great majority of Myanmar citizens were Buddhists, but Buddhism was a tolerant religion. Everyone knew that the components of Myanmar culture, whose origins went back to very ancient times, were gentleness, compassion and tolerance. Anyone who had visited Yangon must have noticed that, in the centre of the city, there stood side by side a Buddhist pagoda, a Christian church, an Islamic mosque, and a Hindu temple, symbolizing the principal religions thriving in the country.

17. The followers of Islam were enabled to go on pilgrimage to Mecca, and Christians could attend various religious events.

18. As Myanmar citizens were predominantly Buddhists, the Government had taken care to ensure that there was no discrimination against other religious faiths, and it had established a Ministry of Religious Affairs to facilitate the promotion and propagation of the various religious faiths, including Islam.

19. The Muslims of Myanmar had never been persecuted. After visiting Rakhine State, the Secretary-General of All Myanmar Moulvis Headquarters had publicly stated that there was no persecution of Muslims in the State. For their part, the authorities had taken adequate measures to ensure that Muslims were treated on an equal footing with the followers of other faiths. For example, Id-al-Adha was designated as a public holiday. In May 1992, 200 Muslims had gone on pilgrimage to Mecca, and the authorities had provided them with the necessary assistance both before and after the pilgrimage. In a message sent to the Hajjis, the Chairman of the State Law and Order Restoration Council had stated that religious freedom was an inalienable right long since enjoyed by the inhabitants of Myanmar, thanks to which the followers of different faiths could live in harmony.

20. The General Secretary of the Myanmar Muslim National Affairs Committee for his part had called on people who had fled to Bangladesh not to believe unfounded reports by the foreign media and to return to their region.

21. At the seventy-fourth meeting of the Myanmar Nairy Ngan Christian Council, the Minister of Religious Affairs had stated that all citizens were free to profess the religion of their choice and to practise and preserve their language, culture, traditions and customs.

22. In conclusion, he said that his delegation had taken note of the observation made by the Special Rapporteur in his report, and that, if complete and sufficient evidence existed, the authorities would look into the allegations in accordance with the laws of the country.

23. Mr. VO VAN AI (International Federation of Human Rights) said that in Viet Nam, which had ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and in which religious freedom was established by article 70 of the Constitution and article 1 of Decree No. 69 of the Council of Ministers concerning the regulation of religious activities, the right to religious freedom was seriously and constantly violated.

24. The main victims of that policy were members of the United Buddhist Church of Viet Nam. He mentioned, as examples, the bullying and repeated harassment inflicted upon the Venerable Thich Hai Tang of the Long An pagoda, Quang Tri and Thich Tri Tuu of the Linh Mu pagoda at Hué, and the arbitrary arrest of the Venerable Thich Khong Tanh, Superior Bonze of the Lien Tri pagoda, in Thu Duc province.

25. His organization and the Viet Nam Committee could make available to the Commission a secret Ministry of the Interior document entitled "Reports on the Situation and Strategy of Struggle Against the United Buddhist Church of Viet Nam", signed by the head of security Colonel Tong Huu Quoc, according to which the repressive strategy consisted in the "mass introduction of political cadres into the community of monks and the faithful ... mobilizing people in support of the revolution in strongly Buddhist areas ... and threatening recusants, and cutting off the arms and legs of opponents ...".

26. It was to be feared that torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment were an integral part of that strategy of harassment. For example, the Venerable Thich Thien An had died under torture on 5 September 1992 - according to the authorities, "he committed suicide during interrogation". The Venerable Thich Nhat Lien, Superior Bonze of the Long Tho pagoda at Dong Nai, had undergone intensive interrogation lasting nine days, at the end of which, drained of strength, he had signed a confession.

27. Furthermore, in the words of Decree No. 69 of the Council of Ministers, "the ordination of clergy and members of orders of the various religions must obtain the approval of the Provincial People's Committee or the corresponding administrative body. For the hierarchical rank of Hoa Thuong (Superior Bonze) for Buddhists, of cardinal, archbishop or bishop for Catholics, and for equivalent posts in other religions, the approval of the Council of Ministers is necessary" (chapter II, article 19). That was an unacceptable infringement of freedom of religion.

28. His organization and the Viet Nam Committee nevertheless welcomed recent statements by Mr. Do Muoi, Secretary-General of the Communist Party, and Mr. Vo van Kiet, the Prime Minister, who had spoken of "abolishing complexes, wiping out hatreds and looking to the future".

29. Noting that profession of faith, his organization and the Viet Nam Committee solemnly called upon the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam to give concrete effect to that new political policy of openness by revoking the sentence of house arrest imposed upon the Venerables Thich Huyen Quang, Thich Quang Do and Thich Nhat Lien, and releasing unconditionally the 29 Buddhist monks and faithful arbitrarily imprisoned for non-violently claiming religious freedom, respect for human rights and democracy, including Thich Tue Sy, Thich Tri Sieu, Thich Khong Tanh, Thich Phuoc Vien, Thich Tam Can and Thich Thien Tan.

30. The Internal Federation of Human Rights and the Viet Nam Committee again called upon the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam to allow an international mission of inquiry to study the situation at first hand.

31. Mrs. SLESZYINSKA (Christian Democrat International - CDI) said that 1992 had, as regards religious freedom, been marked by a recrudescence and aggravation of interreligious conflicts due to intolerance and an increase in the number of civil wars with religious overtones. In Europe, where religious freedom had made rapid progress since the collapse of communism, three States continued to stand out by reason of their policies of non-respect for the rights of religious minorities: Serbia, Turkey and Greece.

32. In the former Yugoslavia, the collapse of communism had resulted in a terrible civil war, conducted by former Communist ultra-nationalist Serbs under the banner of ethnic cleansing. Although what was happening was not a war of religion, the policy of ethnic cleansing had some religious tincture, since, through its actions, the Milosevic regime had affirmed Serbian Orthodox identity by first driving out the Catholic Croats from certain areas of settlement and then by practising a strategy of terror against the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

33. In Turkey, a secular State where Islam was the dominant religion, the Assyrian (Christian) community in the South-East of the country at present numbered only 4,000 members, as compared with 150,000 in the 1960s. That decrease was due to various forms of persecution to which the community had been subjected for decades both by the Turkish authorities and the Kurds.

34. In Greece, conscientious objectors, mostly on religious grounds, were invariably sentenced to four years' military imprisonment, no civilian service being available. Moreover, non-Orthodox believers were discriminated against, particularly as regards access to teaching and the civil service. That discrimination had very recently been aggravated by the retention of a compulsory reference to religion on the new European identity card.

35. In Africa, religious intolerance had manifested itself above all in Sudan and Egypt. The army officers in power in Khartoum were exterminating by arms and starvation the Christians living in the south of the country. An odious form of pressure was brought to bear on Christians: bread in exchange for their conversion to Islam. In Egypt, Coptic Christians were regularly attacked by mobs of Muslim fundamentalists who had committed murders, looted shops and destroyed churches.

36. In India, at Ayodhya, a holy place claimed by Hindus, dozens of Muslims had been massacred by Hindu fundamentalists, who had also manhandled or driven out Catholic priests and Protestant ministers in a number of places.

37. In China, the Roman Catholic Church continued to be condemned to an underground existence - as also were Protestant Churches. Dozens of Christians had been imprisoned on account of their religious activities.

38. In Latin America, several countries had revised their constitutions in favour of religious freedom. Mexico had recognized the Catholic Church, and Colombia had placed all religions on an equal footing. In Cuba, in spite of a constitutional reform allegedly aimed at ensuring religious freedom, several religious movements were still not recognized and were subject to very severe repression.

39. The CDI appealed to States still practising religious oppression to comply with article 18 of the Universal Declaration. It called on the Governments of countries affected by religious conflicts to bring them to a rapid termination, and to prosecute and severely punish those responsible for acts or statements of religious hatred. The CDI appealed to religious leaders to intensify the teaching of tolerance and respect for other faiths, including respect for those who professed no religious belief.

40. Mrs. CRAMER (International Progress Organization) said that the reply by the Government of the United States of America to the Special Rapporteur concerning the Lyndon LaRouche case contained numerous misrepresentations (see E/CN.4/1993/62, para. 67).

41. The United States Government stated that Mr. LaRouche had been given due process under the laws of the United States but failed to mention that a group of attorneys, including Mr. Ramsey Clark, former United States Attorney-General, had filed before the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals a habeas corpus motion presenting evidence that the conviction and detention of Mr. LaRouche were unlawful by reason of outrageous irregularities deliberately committed by the prosecution.

42. The statement that Mr. LaRouche's conviction resulted from fraudulent fund-raising activities to finance his presidential campaigns was incorrect, as was the allegation that some lenders had lost their life savings. One prosecution witness, Mrs. Elizabeth Sexton, had claimed that she had lost her last dime to the LaRouche association, but the defence team had subsequently proved that she had had considerable financial means both at the time of and after the trial.

43. Contrary to what was stated by the United States Government, Mr. LaRouche and his associates had never been indicted or prosecuted for tax crimes.

44. The United States Government had stated that the Boston trial had ended in a mistrial, but had failed to report that a member of the jury had publicly stated that the jury would have voted for acquittal, and that the federal judge in the case, Mr. Robert E. Keeton, had referred publicly to the Government's "systemic and institutional prosecutorial misconduct". The above-mentioned habeas corpus motion specifically stated that the Government had systematically withheld exculpatory material in an effort to prevent discovery of the truth. Mrs. LaRouche, had, moreover, told the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities that the main obstacle to a fair trial for her husband had been the refusal of President Bush and the prosecution to release exculpatory material on grounds of national security (see E/CN.4/Sub.2/1992/SR.22, para. 21).

45. The International Progress Organization associated itself with the more than 1,000 prominent personalities from around the world in appealing to President Bill Clinton to break with the policies of his predecessor and free political prisoner Lyndon LaRouche. Her organization also appealed to the Commission on Human Rights to take steps to ensure that the United States Government respected human rights like other civilized nations.

46. Mr. ROSSI (International Association for the Defence of Religious Liberty) said that the world was witnessing a frightening increase in intolerance. Many people were unwilling to accept others in their diversity and difference, and were determined to assert their own nationality, race, religion and culture while denying the same right to others. As Voltaire had asked in his Treatise on Tolerance, were we not all children of the same father and creatures of the same God?

47. How could one fail to castigate as an act of extreme intolerance the use of rape upon many thousands of women - mainly Muslims - as a "weapon of war" in the territory of the former Yugoslavia?

48. It was not within the competence of States to impose any specific world view, religious or otherwise, upon their citizens. The State should be the common home of all its citizens, which meant that ideological pluralism must be not only accepted de facto in each country but recognized by law.

49. Religions, which took a universal view of the human family and preached justice, peace and love between human beings should play a major role in the building of a pluralist society respectful of human rights. At the present time, however, one was witnessing the growth of religious totalitarianism and the establishment of totalitarian theocratic regimes.

50. The Catholic bishops had written with regard to Sudan in a document issued on 6 October 1992 at Rome that "people are literally terrorized by the repressive nature of a fundamentalist Islamic regime which is seeking to Arabize and Islamize non-Arabs and non-Muslims by force, even going so far as to use food as a weapon". In that country, the right to genuine religious freedom was not recognized for Muslims either: a Sudanese Muslim who changed his religion and publicly admitted it would be condemned to death under article 126 of the Penal Code. That state of affairs was particularly inadmissible since the Koran did not provide for the death penalty for apostasy. On the contrary, Islam favoured religious freedom for all individuals.

51. In Iran, the law of a single religion prevailed, and savage repression was visited upon dissidents and opponents. According to the official press, 113,000 women had been arrested in a single year for "incorrect wearing of the veil and spreading moral corruption". The Baha'is continued to be persecuted and treated as "unprotected infidels".

52. In Saudi Arabia, all religions, with the single exception of Islam, were forbidden, and Saudis did not have the right to change their religion, under penalty of death.

53. Three million immigrants, including half a million Christians, working in that country and comprising two thirds of the active population, were denied the right to profess their faith and have places of worship.

54. In conclusion, he hoped that the Commission on Human Rights would continue to concern itself with the human rights situation in Iran, and that it would also study the cases of Sudan and Saudi Arabia.

55. Mr. SZTEJNBER (Pax Christi, International Catholic Peace Movement) said that he spoke as a Jew and a rabbi, and one of over 100 members whose family had been murdered by the Nazis in Poland. As current events showed, Europe was once again plunged in savagery in spite of repeated United Nations appeals for common sense, reason and universal fraternity.

56. Specialists had been trying for several decades to explain human rights violations by complex historical factors of a political, economic, social and cultural nature. In his report submitted in the preceding year (E/CN.4/1992/52), Mr. d'Almeida Ribeiro had written that, at the root of phenomena of intolerance, could be found certain dogmatic interpretations which fuelled incomprehension and hate between various religious communities. One could not stand passively aside when faced with dogmatic philosophical and religious theories which prevented any communication between peoples. They were not manifestations of religious mania but of psychopathology.

57. Vigilance was necessary not to allow religious attitudes and delusions to develop that could have a deleterious affect upon the personalities of children. Far from hindering the growth of healthy spirituality, a warning against the dangers of dogmatic beliefs that inhibited thought, and consequently freedom, would make it possible to build up safety barriers to protect the nobility and lucidity of the soul against beliefs that perverted the true sense of the sacred.

58. Contemporary science provided valuable tools to assist in separating the wheat from the tares in religious concepts. It was not a matter of creating a new universal religion, but of identifying in each spiritual persuasion, through collective fraternal and worldwide work, the teachings capable of enriching the universal conscience and fostering the development of the emotive and collective faculties of the child, and thus helping it to achieve the maturity to acknowledge other people's right to be different.

59. How could human dignity be protected if one section of our contemporaries set themselves up - more or less consciously and in the name of perverse religious ideologies - as divinities, denying others the right to question their behaviour? Fortunately, the dignitaries and leaders of contemporary mainstream religions showed a wish to communicate and learn from contact with religious beliefs differing from their own. There was every reason to hope that interdenominational relations would be pursued in an atmosphere of confidence and fraternal cordiality.

60. A new dynamic for peace must be created that would be able to bring down the walls of hatred raised up between peoples by centuries of emotional and cultural isolation. That would make it possible to hope that future generations would be protected against new demagogues skilled in exploiting the individual and collective frustrations of the masses that could be the more easily worked upon because they were the heirs of religious cultures linked with concepts that were sometimes misguided and inhibited mental energies and freedom of choice.

61. The time had come to face the facts: the solution for the worldwide imbalance between North and South should begin by a clean sweep of fantasies and delusions, for the origin of wars lay in the human imagination and in

mental sclerosis. That task demanded cooperation between scientific endeavour and a sound spiritual outlook emerging from all religious persuasions, for science and religion were complementary to one another.

62. A symposium entitled "Scientific, Medical, Economic, Political and Spiritual Prevention of Violations of Human Rights and the Rights of the Child" would be held from 23-26 November 1993 in the International Conference Centre in Geneva. The symposium, in which Mr. d'Almeida Ribeiro would participate, would prepare the ground for a new convention on education, science and spirituality.

63. Mr. FERNANDEZ (International Organization for the Development of Freedom of Education) said that he had noted from Mr. d'Almeida Ribeiro's report: that a considerable number of Governments did not answer the Special Rapporteur's questions, especially those on freedom of education; that freedom of conscience and thought continued to be violated in many countries; and that some forms of intolerance were re-emerging in countries that had been believed secure from that scourge.

64. Article 5 of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, dealing with freedom of education, stated that parents had "the right to organize the life within the family in accordance with their religion or belief". That right was sometimes questioned on the grounds that it infringed upon the rights of the State in the field of education, but parents were best able to represent the rights of minors. Only totalitarian regimes had sought to deprive the family of that right.

65. The first paragraph of article 5 meant that parents had the right to bring up their children with a certain view of the world and to set moral standards before them. States frequently feared that parents would indoctrinate their children by manipulating their thoughts. It should be borne in mind that political groups and the State could also yield to the temptation of manipulation. Accordingly, the third paragraph of article 5 provided for a number of safeguards.

66. Paragraphs 3 and 5 laid down, among other things, that every religion or belief should be taught in a spirit of tolerance, fraternity and peace, with respect for the belief of others, and that each person's talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men, and with respect for the physical and mental health of the child.

67. The international community had armed itself with a sufficiently clear instrument to preclude any manipulation. His organization hoped that that instrument would become effective in the lives of nations.

68. Mrs. FARHI (World Jewish Congress) said that the reason why many people were victims of serious violations of their fundamental rights was, whatever the States concerned might say in their answers to the Special Rapporteur, that their religion or belief did not conform to those professed by the secular or religious authorities.

69. In India, confrontations between Muslim and Hindu extremists had led to thousands of deaths. In Africa, clashes had erupted between Muslims and Christians. The situation of Muslims in Myanmar was appalling. The Shiites were persecuted in Iraq, as were Christians and Animists in Sudan, where the death penalty for apostasy had recently been introduced.

70. In China, Tibetan clergy were persecuted, as were some Christian groups, and the Ahmadis in Pakistan, where blasphemy carried the death penalty.

71. The inability of the international community to deal with those tragic situations underscored the need to draft a binding international instrument on the elimination of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief, which would make those responsible for such atrocities accountable for their actions. The arguments of opponents of such an instrument were all more or less specious.

72. In the Russian Federation, some 50 newspapers and periodicals had published virulently anti-Semitic articles over the past year. It was true that the editors of two publications, Russkoye Voskresnye and Narodnoye Delo had been charged under article 24 of the Russian Criminal Code, and that 16 racist publications were under investigation. It seemed, however, that the publication of such incendiary material had been facilitated by the absence of adequate control over the mass media by the Ministry of Information and press bodies.

73. The publication of anti-Semitic literature had also been growing at an alarming rate in Romania. The Prosecutor General of Romania had recently rejected a request by the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania to take legal action against the weekly magazine Europa. Other publications, such as Natiunea, Gazeta de Vest and România Mare were also conducting a vehement anti-Jewish campaign. No effective action by the authorities had so far been taken to curb those practices.

74. Germany was also witnessing xenophobic and anti-Semitic violence, which gave grounds for grave concern, and on which the authorities were taking only belated action.

75. The World Jewish Congress welcomed the improvement in the situation of the Jewish minority in Syria, and hoped that its members would be able to leave the country freely, and that the very full documentation that had been compiled on the community would be used exclusively for benevolent purposes.

76. Mrs. ELGAPRESTA (Human Rights Law Group) said that it was clear from Mr. d'Almeida Ribeiro's report that religious intolerance was still rife in several countries, including China, Iraq and Cuba.

77. In China, Buddhist monks and Christians were persecuted. For example, the Vicar-General of the Roman Catholic Church in Baoding had been sentenced to three years in prison, and Father Francis Wang Yijun to three years in a "re-education" camp.

78. In Iraq, many cemeteries, libraries, religious schools and places of worship had been vandalized or destroyed on the pretext that they were centres of subversion.

79. In Cuba, the Church had had to close down its places of worship for lack of priests, who were not allowed to enter Cuba. There was not a single shop in that country where religious objects could be bought. Hundreds of religious and human rights organizations which fulfilled the legal conditions for recognition had applied to be registered as associations but had never received an answer. Missionary activity, processions, radio broadcasts and religious schools were forbidden, and the religious and political ideas of all pupils and their parents were filed.

80. According to Agence France-Presse, Roberto de Jesus Alvarez had been dismissed from his post for getting married in church; Joel Matos had been wounded by a bullet on 29 July 1992 while selling religious pictures and sentenced to six months in prison. Opponents of the regime and defenders of human rights were termed "anti-social" and interned in special camps, where they were ill-treated. That had happened, for example, to the President of the Cuban Episcopal Conference, Jaime Ortega Alamino, and the poet Silvio Rodriguez. A human rights activist, Paula Valiente, had been beaten unconscious in a church for having called for the release of prisoners of conscience. The Cuban State regarded religion as the opium of the people, and those professing the Catholic faith were not allowed to work as teachers.

81. In conclusion, she said that seeking to stifle faith was a sign of grave ignorance, for religion was an integral part of the human being.

82. Mrs. SILVERA NUNEZ (Cuba), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that United States representatives constantly displayed their ignorance of history and the situation of Cuba. The only cult that existed in Cuba was the cult of dignity, sovereignty, and national independence, and that the Cuban people would never give up. The Cuban people admired and supported its heroes and its leaders, who had struggled to rid themselves of neo-colonialism and to build a new country.

83. The Cuban Constitution expressly acknowledged the right of every citizen to profess the religion of his choice. Believers could be members of the Communist Party. It was utterly false to claim that religious processions were forbidden, and she went on to quote a number which were famous throughout the entire island.

84. In conclusion, she said that the attempts to tarnish the image of Cuba were of little significance; history would prove the Cuban people right.

85. Mr. ABUGIDERI (Sudan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the statements by the representatives of the United States of America, Ireland and some non-governmental organizations were extremely unfair, if not positively malicious.

86. The accusation that the Sudanese Government was using food as a weapon was totally unfounded, and was particularly preposterous in light of the fact that of the 45 NGOs working in Sudan, only two were Islamic.

87. It should also be remembered that the right to freedom of belief was enshrined in the recommendations adopted by the National Conference, whose purpose was to establish a federal system within which each State would have the right to make its own laws. In virtue of its traditions, Southern Sudan was not obliged to apply Islamic laws.

88. His Sudanese delegation wished to reaffirm that there was no discrimination in Sudan. As a result of the fighting in southern Sudan between the armed forces and the rebels, and between various rebel factions, more than 3 million Sudanese, mainly non-Muslims, had fled to the north, where they were living peacefully with their northern Sudanese brothers - a fact which alone was sufficient to refute allegations of ethnic or religious discrimination.

89. Two weeks previously, Pope John Paul II had visited Sudan, at the invitation of the Sudanese Government, had met thousands of Christians at Khartoum and made several speeches in public. It seemed difficult in those circumstances to speak of religious intolerance.

90. The representative of the so-called Association for the Defence of Religious Liberty had once again used the forum of the Commission on Human Rights to disparage Islam. If he was a genuine defender of religious freedom, he would have spared a word of sympathy for the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

91. In spite of the invitations extended to him by the Sudanese Government, the Special Rapporteur had never visited the country. The allegations made in his report therefore required to be substantiated. The allegations made by the representative of the United States of America and Western delegations were evidence of a discriminatory attitude towards Sudan.

The meeting rose at 9.05 p.m.